2: Bowers E-5 (1930-1931)1950 NQ17 Mandan NQ17

Chapter IV

THE OKIPA CEREMONY

THE Okipa[1] ceremony was an elaborate and complicated affair. It was a dramatization of the creation of the earth, its people, plants, and animals, together with the struggles the Mandan endured to attain their present position. The history of the tribe was a part of the secret lore held by the officers of the ceremony. The uninformed could pay to have the creation myths told but could not repeat them. The songs, chants, and rituals were conducted by men who by virtue of inheritance and purchase had acquired that right, but the words were unintelligible to the population at large, being, according to tradition, in an ancient Nuptadi dialect. Only the legitimate officers understood their meaning, and that information was never divulged to another except when purchase was being made into the ceremony. The few phrases recognized, such as "Corn Mother" and "Thunder Father," were insufficient to understand the substance of the rites.

Certain arrangement of lodges within the village was necessary for the performance of the ceremony. Each village had an open circle some one hundred and fifty feet in diameter reserved for this ceremony, and lodges were not permitted in that section. A cedar post, surrounded by a plank wall, occupied the center of this open circle, and lodges were arranged around the circle with their entrances toward the cedar.

The ceremonial lodge was to the north of the cedar and was a part of the row of lodges facing toward the open circle. It was distinguishable from the other lodges by its flat side at the entrance (see Fig. 13), which was to the south. It was so oriented that the entrance faced in the direction Lone Man went when he left the tribe.

Since lodges were not permitted within the open circle, nor were ashes and refuse deposited there, through normal accumu-

1. The word *okipE'* means "to look alike" and refers to the Bull Dancers, who were of the same stature and were painted and dressed alike for the dances.

[Culture hero; impersonated in the Okipa ceremony - Anal 45]

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chief's lodge, where they waited for Lone Man. Dressed in his ceremonial paraphernalia, he came directly toward the village from the prairies to the south.[12] When he reached the village, he was met by the Black Mouth Society men (the police), who questioned him as to whether he was a friend or enemy until he had made known his identity and explained that he had come from his home on a high hill, generally associated with Buffalo Home Butte, in the south to open their Okipa lodge door for the buffalo dance. He was taken directly to the lodge by the custodian of the Okipa lodge, where the head men were assembled. There he told of the time when he lived with the Mandan. He told of the conflict with Hoita concerning a white buffalo robe and that he had once freed the animals from the Dog Den Butte so the Mandan would not starve. He told how he had saved them from the flood and that he had given them the turtles, sacred cedar, Okipa lodge, and the ceremony itself. He told them that he returned every year when the willow leaves were full grown to open their Okipa lodge. He was dressed in a wolf robe, and his body and face were painted white; he wore a headdress of porcupine hair fringed with jackrabbit fur, and on the top of this he had tied a stuffed raven. His collar and anklets were of jackrabbit skin. He carried a wooden pipe in the left hand and in the right hand a flattened ash club with the moon and thunderbird on one side, the morning star and the sun on the other.

The head chief sent the announcer through the village to order all the women and small children to stay in their lodges and to keep their dogs tied up inside while the Lone Man made the rounds of the village relating the origin of the people[13] and their struggles against starvation and floods. At lodges in which resided young men who were to be tortured during the ceremony, he secured knives which he took to the Okipa lodge to be used later in cutting the flesh of the ones undergoing the torture feature. He carried a bag of pemmican from which he gave each man a handful. Much of the day was spent in relating the history of the people and the manner of acquiring all the things he had given the people to make them happy.

12. At Like-a-Fishhook Village he approached from downstream, which was from an easterly direction.

13. Witnesses to this portion of the ceremony say that a very old language was used, the words being largely unintelligible.

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lodge again, Lone Man would get up and ask the Black Bears and Grizzly Bears to go out and see if there were any offerings to them. They would go outside. At the same time the Birds would be walking around watching the Antelopes. The Stars were painted in red with white spots all over. There was one man dressed as Dry Meat, and he would have red marks in different places over his body. 796

FIG. 23.—Okipa ceremony impersonators: Snake and Beaver. (After Catlin.)

The singers told us to stand in front of them. Lone Man would say something I could not understand, for he used an old Mandan dialect, but afterward I learned that he was saying something which had to do with a cleaning act to make us light and active in dancing. [198]

Then Lone Man said that the singers should begin again. The men with the rattles began and the other singers joined in beating the turtles. It seemed that the earth was shaking. At that time First Creator was gone, but I saw him afterward on the south side of the cedar. All that time, two Women, four Buf-

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in the traditions about their clothing. They continued moving up the river until they came to the mouth of the Missouri River. They saw many trees on the Mississippi River and decided to go across and live on the Mississippi. They stayed in that country for three or four years, all the time planting corn along the river. They said, "We have discovered a better river and it will be a good place to plant the corn." They discovered fine evergreen trees, and we have called them medicine trees since that time.

There were no bows and arrows in those days, and one of the men made a bow and arrows, practicing with them and picking out sharp bones with which to tip the arrows. He also found the sinews that would stretch the bow. We do not know if they were eating meat or not at that time. There were many elk, deer, and beaver on this river, and that is why they called it Good River. At that time they found a dead buffalo in a mud hole, and one of them said that they ought to take the hide off and cut it into a long string to catch deer with. When they took the hide off, they cut the strings and twisted them to dry. Then they made a loop on the end. They would go out and find deer trails to hang it in to catch the deer. They made many of these snares and set them out in many places. They would find some dead deer and even some elk hanging there.

After they learned how to do this, they had plenty of meat to eat with their corn. They stayed at that place for over ten years. It was at this time that they learned how to use the bow and arrows tipped with bone, to kill smaller game.

Again they moved from there farther up the Mississippi River until they found a place where there was much timber but the surrounding land was flat. They found a flat place where the timber was not so thick, and there they lived for six years. At that time they called themselves Nu'itadi, meaning "from us." Some of them were called Nup'tadi (no meaning); another group was called Awi'gaxa (no meaning). One of the latter two bands moved from the others under a chief named Four Bulls and came to a place where there was much timber. The village after the split must have been in the western part of Minnesota not far from Pipestone.

They traveled southward then until they came to heavy timber and had a big village[41] there. While there they learned more about bows and arrows and could shoot even beavers and other game. Then they had plenty of food. Again they traveled on through the deep timber and had another village, staying there for four years. The earth lodges at that time were of the eagle-trapping type with grass and dirt covering the sides.

When they stopped there, a man went out looking for game and followed a creek. He saw some mud sticking out of a hill, and there was a spring at that place. The mud was sticky; he took some of it out and carried it away a short distance. He left some of it flat on the ground to dry. When he went back where he had left the mud, it was hard except that there was one crack. He thought that there should be some use for that mud. He thought, "I will get some sand and mix it with this mud and leave it again. It might be of some use." Then he went home again. When he returned, the mud was still cracked. He thought, "If I crack some stones and crush them fine to mix with the clay,

41. These villages were named in the Okipa ceremony, but the language used was unintelligible to the listener, as it was an old dialect. The translation was a part of the secret lore which passed with bundle sales.

4: Lowie E-5 (1910-1911) 1913
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

When our fathers had sat down, one of our number, Wounded-face, rose and said, "Well, comrades and women friends, listen. We have brought our food here, and we wish to select our fathers tonight. Do each of you rise and set your food before your father." Then each of us rose, picked up his kettle, and walked past the door-side of the fireplace to his father. I picked out one of my clan fathers and gave him my kettle; then I returned to my place. Black-head, who had watched my movements, then came forward and brought her kettle to the man indicated as my father. Those purchasers who had no clan fathers among the sellers selected anyone they pleased for their individual father. The fathers ate of the food, leaving some for their wives, who emptied the kettles and returned them to their husbands. Then Good-bear called me by name and said, "Come, son, and get your kettle." I went towards him and stood before him. Then Good-bear prayed to the supernatural powers: "I have gone through the Oki'pɛ ceremony myself and have undergone great hardships for your sake. In other ceremonies I have also undergone suffering. Before I underwent this suffering, I thought you would help me whenever I could not do something by my own power. I have no power to give honor marks, therefore I ask you to help me by securing honor marks for my son." Then I took both kettles and went back to my place, where I returned to Black-head her own kettle. Each of the boys acted in a similar way.

After all of us had sat down, our fathers began to sing. They beat drums, but did not dance. They sang these words: —

"ma'kĭtā'ni máhuna."
"You, wake up and come."

[These words are supposed to be addressed to one's sweetheart.]

Four times they sang such songs. Then came a second set of songs, during which the fathers danced in their places. When they had done dancing, they addressed us in obsolete Mandan, saying, "Sĭ! i'karē'xoc!" ("Clan son, daylight is here!") Shot-foot, one of the fathers, rose to address us. He said, "Sĭ, we wish you to give us a ten nights' feast. This will give us time to prepare clothes for you."

This meeting took place in the evening, each of our female "friends" brought in a bundle of willows carried by means of a tump line and a second line passing around the breast. The bundles were piled up on the left side of the door (for one entering), and from time to time one of the boys would rise to keep up the fire. This purchase took place in midsummer. I was about 20 years old at the time.

On each of the ten nights the fathers came in in the same way as the first time, and the mode of procedure was the same. On the tenth night, the fathers said, "Sons, we have done; tomorrow we shall give you your things." On the following morning we came back to the same lodge and took our seats, but without any kettles. Our women "friends" also came in and sat down. This time, however, we were not ranged in an ellipse as before, but sat in the arc of a circle, with our "friends" in a similar arc from 4½ to 5 feet behind us. Until this day White-bear's house had served as the place of assembly for the fathers prior to their approach to our own meeting-place, but this morning each came from his own lodge, their wives carrying the clothes to be presented to the purchasers of the society. The fathers sat down in a curved line opposite to ours, and their wives took seats behind them. There were about thirty fathers; sometimes two boys had the same father. They planted two sticks into the ground in the rear (mana'ktata) of the lodge. One of the sticks was hooked, and its shaft was wrapped with otterskin; three eagle feathers hung down from the end of the hook. The second stick was straight and also wrapped with otterskin;

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
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LETTER—No. 18.

MANDAN VILLAGE, UPPER MISSOURI.

461 535 The Mandans, like all other tribes, lead lives of idleness and leisure; and of course, devote a great deal of time to their sports and amusements, of which they have a great variety. Of these, dancing is one of the principal, and may be seen in a variety of forms: such as the buffalo dance, the boasting dance, the begging dance, the scalp dance, and a dozen other kinds of dances, all of which have their peculiar characters and meanings or objects.

535 633 198 These exercises are exceedingly grotesque in their appearance, and to the eye of a traveller who knows not their meaning or importance, they are an uncouth and frightful display of starts, and jumps, and yelps, and jarring gutturals, which are sometimes truly terrifying. But when one gives them a little attention, and has been lucky enough to be initiated into their mysterious meaning, they become a subject of the most intense and exciting interest. Every dance has its peculiar step, and every step has its meaning; every dance also has its peculiar song, and that is so intricate and mysterious oftentimes, that not one in ten of the young men who are dancing and singing it, know the meaning of the song which they are chanting over. None but the medicine-men are allowed to understand them; and even they are generally only initiated into these secret arcana, on the payment of a liberal stipend for their tuition, which requires much application and study. There is evidently a set song and sentiment for every dance, for the songs are perfectly measured, and sung in exact time with the beat of the drum; and always with an uniform and invariable set of sounds and expressions, which clearly indicate certain sentiments, which are expressed by the voice, though sometimes not given in any known language whatever.

They have other dances and songs which are not so mystified, but which are sung and understood by every person in the tribe, being sung in their own language, with much poetry in them, and perfectly metred, but without rhyme. On these subjects I shall take another occasion to say more; and will for the present turn your attention to the style and modes in which some of these curious transactions are conducted.

535 My ears have been almost continually ringing since I came here, with the din of yelping and beating of the drums; but I have for several days